

Dear Co-Chair Kennedy, Co-Chair Miner, Co-Chair Demicco, Vice Chair Flexer, Vice Chair Gresko, Vice Chair Somers, Ranking Member Harding, and Honorable Members of the Environment Committee,

Please accept this public hearing testimony in OPPOSITION to SB 832.

I care deeply about all animals, including wildlife.. I have been concerned about the DEEP ratcheting up fear in humans about predator animals, especially bears, asking people to contact them every time they see a bear. This has only resulted in overblown numbers of bears as each bear is reported numerous time, building up unnecessary fear in people. I know that the DEEP has been gung ho about establishing a bear hunting lottery to give hunters the gift of bear hunting in CT, hence the quest that people call in every time each person sees a bear. However, I see no real reason to decrease the number of ears in our state. There has been no true danger seen by our population of bears, of which no real or reliable number has been attained. We have no reason to allow bears to be hunted in our state. People should be educated on what to do if they come across a bear and they should know what they should do to make sure their yard, house is not a place for bears to come for food. Lately, there has been a ridiculous push to get people to report coyotes and even bobcats when they see one. People are not in danger of being hurt by these animals unless there is the rare case where there's a rabid one but that could be true of smaller animals. Fear mongering and encouraging people to report to officials every time one is spotted is a horrible and unnecessary plan. Instead, DEEP should support and promote humane resolutions to conflicts with wildlife and preventative measures to minimize risk of such conflicts. Feral cats are the saddest animals, all preventable if humans spay/neutered and cared for their cats instead of abandoning them and leaving them to fend for themselves. Many had a human at one time but then they were left behind or abandoned. They are often victims of cruelty, shot at, given poison, hurt in heinous ways by humans in the vicinity who they believe are going to give them some food and lovin'. The cruelty against feral cats is horrendous in spite of the cats trying to survive in a cold world where they were abandoned or born outdoors by a thrown away mama cat. People that feed and make shelters for feral cats, as well as TNR them to stop the repopulation, are true angels! They need the support and need to be allowed to keep feeding the cats. My 2 cats showed up in our yard in different years. Two other throw away friendly cats showed up thru the years but we were able to find great homes for them. The 4 cats were lucky to find homes but so many abandoned cats aren't so lucky, nor the kittens born from unsplayed females and who are scared of humans. People that feed and TNR cats are wonderful. The cats need them!

I oppose SB 832 as currently written for the following 4 reasons:

1) SB 832 does not address the major sources of habituation (e.g., accessible garbage, pet food left outside, certain types of bird feeders)! As currently written, SB 832 does not serve to address the issue of conflicts with potentially dangerous wildlife;

2) SB 832 would unfairly penalize those who care for community cats. Sec. 1 (e), which defines "potentially dangerous animal" for purposes of this section, includes "felidae," a broad family of felids that includes domestic cats. Community cat caregivers provide a public service at oftentimes great personal expense, reducing cat overpopulation through TNR (trap, neuter, return) programs, a science-based approach that has been proven effective. Absence of this public service would generate a near-immediate outcome of overcrowded conditions and stretched resources at animal control agencies and shelters. Rather than penalizing these generous caregivers, and stretching the already strapped animal care infrastructure, emphasis should instead be placed on proactive solutions, like laws and ordinances that focus on incentivizing spay/neuter and humane management programs for community cats;

3) SB 832 would be unpopular and unenforceable. Sec. 1 (e) contains the biological family names "felidae" and "canidae," which include domestic cats and domestic dogs. Inclusion of these categories would be hugely unpopular with Connecticut voters, and as a practical matter, unenforceable; and

4) Unlike last year's bill (2016's HB 5315), SB 832 makes no provision for education, and public education is precisely what is indicated here.

Substitute language should be considered that would address the matter of habituation and conflict prevention through public education on how to coexist with coyotes and bears. DEEP should partner with The Humane Society of the United States or other national animal associations that can assist in devising and organizing educational materials and outreach to help the public.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,
Ilene Coman
East Haddam, CT,